

THE LABOUR ORGANISER

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Review of the Month

HOLIDAYS are over. And thank God for that is probably the comment of quite a few of our readers.

It is in this way that we dismiss Summer from our minds, and Christmas too, and all the other breaks. We are an unthankful race, but if it helps us in the return to slogging, the means, or the meanness of it, may be justified by the end. Anyway it is better not to copy Lot's wife, but to concentrate on the busy season ahead. September ushers in the really hardest and busiest season that the calendar knows. This month we plan a winter's work; next month the towns contest the municipal elections; and right till Christmas propaganda of one sort and another and social activities, keep us busy. "Crisis," it is said, is still with us, but the Party which knows how to go calmly on with its work, as the Labour Party has done, shows itself most fitting for the hour—and the hours that follow after. The winter's work will justify our faith.

The revision sittings during the past month appear to have resulted in nothing striking in any part of the country. This is to be expected now that the franchise is so largely extended and practically every contentious principle settled. With the end of the revision courts comes also the end of any opportunity to amend the register before next year, and it is once again to be regretted that the majority of Local Parties have let their opportunities go by. So far as we can ascertain only a minority of Labour Parties take any serious steps in registration, and a still smaller minority are represented when the sittings take place. This, in spite of the fact that reports constantly reach us of districts where the Home Office instructions are ignored, and no

forms are delivered to householders. It is too late now to cry over spilt milk. The register, which comes into force on the 15th October seems unlikely to cover a Parliamentary Election, but By-elections will be affected, and of course all Local Government Elections. Yet, it is probable that in every election of whatever kind electors will present themselves with a valid claim to vote only to find themselves without one. Well, well, we shall take this up again another day.

The past month has also seen developments in the split which the Bradford resolutions occasioned in the I.L.P. The members of this body who remained true to the traditional attitude towards the Labour Party, do not appear to be taking their expulsion lying down. The national gathering at Leicester is to be the opportunity for setting up a new Socialist organisation on the old traditions, though whether this organisation will embrace the Scottish I.L.P.'s who have voted in favour of affiliation seems doubtful. It is quite possible that in Scotland a separate organisation may emerge. The "New Leader" has published week by week a list of I.L.P. Branch decisions, and the information is illuminating rather as showing the insignificance of many of these organisations when the figure of the voting is given. It is not to be expected that the "New Leader" list will be altogether accurate or complete, but the information, even so far as it goes, indicates the attenuated condition of the Branches. When the ranks of the affiliationists are organised and the new organisation has got to work we shall not be surprised to find that here also lies the major intellectual and numerical strength.

Our reference to Federations of Labour Parties in the July "Labour Organiser" has been misunderstood in

some quarters. We made it quite clear that these Federations have a definite and desirable function to perform, and we think we have previously made it clear that when sufficient experience has been gained, County Federations ought to form an integral and recognised part of the Labour machine. We note that the Labour Party is to be invited by a rules amendment at its forthcoming Conference at Leicester, to at once give Conference representation and recognition to Federations. A further resolution instructs the National E.C. to frame a Constitution for County Federations, and to incorporate in such Constitution a definite plan for such Federations to participate in the work of representation and election of Labour Members to County Councils. The intention here is quite good, but our view is that the time is not yet. There are certain Federations which are doing useful work, but the value of several others is extremely doubtful. If County Federations are established by rule it follows that a certain amount of Divisional independence will be lost, and there must also be a compulsory affiliation fee. The Federations which are not justifying their existence are the bodies which are the real obstacle to a changed condition of things and it is not to be wondered at if Divisional Parties object to forfeiting to these bodies a portion of their independence and a part of their cash. Some Federations do nothing more than call an occasional Conference for the discussion of questions of policy. They neglect entirely their opportunities for helping the weaker constituencies; yet surely this ought to be a prime function of a County Federation? It is also easier to suggest that rules should be formulated than to lay down guiding principles in this matter. The Counties differ widely in local circumstances and existing Federations reflect these differences in their composition, and in their rules.

What is the general principle which must be laid down here? For the moment we are satisfied that the National E.C. are most anxious to avail themselves of the good offices of such Federations as exist, to encourage their work, and to assist them in every way. Experience is thus being gathered, and that we believe is the more important thing for the moment.

Reference to the activities of County Federations in calling County Conferences reminds us of an evil which is creating some confusion in certain parts of the country. The Labour Party from time to time plan regional conferences on specific subjects throughout the country. The present regional districts of the Party are too large for a single conference to cover the areas, and as a consequence the areas and counties are grouped, and one regional area will be supplied with several Conferences. These Party functions in our opinion ought to command the first attention of all Local Labour Parties. The Federations also sometimes plan County Conferences, and these are quite legitimate and proper affairs. The Labour Party has on several occasions altered its plans to accommodate Federation Conferences, and the future ought to see a closer co-operation in this matter, and more intimate working. But our theme is not that. We desire to raise a protest against individual constituencies, some of whom have offended again and again, who convene Conferences at their own pleasure and at their own time, without any consultation with other authorities. In one County there is a round of Conferences throughout the year — the Labour Party, the County Federation, and two or three Divisional Parties, not to mention a Trades Council Federation, and the I.L.P. all taking a hand. In addition,

(Please turn to page 136.)

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The Labour Party Conference Agenda

WHAT WE THINK ABOUT SOME RESOLUTIONS.

When in April last the Labour Party issued its notices of the Annual Conference, it suggested that organisations should desist from forwarding numbers of miscellaneous resolutions of the usual character, in order to allow full discussion of the various reports, the political and economic situation, and the questions of policy it was proposed to bring forward.

The conference agenda now in circulation indicates that so far from there being any response to the above suggestion, affiliated organisations seem to have set themselves the task this year of sending in resolutions on a greater variety of subjects than ever. This seems to us unfortunate, not because we desire to limit the initiative of affiliated organisations, but because the present action may operate in just that way, and may result in further steps being taken to prevent the agenda of the Party Conference becoming overloaded with altogether minor and irrelevant questions.

Let us example the piffling sideline concerning Electoral Reform raised by the Lichfield D.L.P., who want the hours of polling in Local Government Elections to be from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. What of the bigger issues, which surely more concern the Conference?

And what on earth has the Labour Party Conference to do with a fixed Easter as suggested by the Blackpool D.L.P.? The fact appears to be that at the present moment anybody with a bee in his bonnet on a particular sideline can easily persuade his Divisional Party to send in a resolution on the subject.

And it is just here that the remedy lies. Divisional Parties (but they are not the only offenders) should make sure that resolutions they send in for discussion bear upon some vital point worthy of the attention of the important gathering they come before. Unless this is done we can imagine that steps may have to be considered rationing resolutions, or even limiting resolutions to those sent in by County Federations where such are established and recognised. As it is we anticipate a wholesale slaughter of the innocents under the existing rule by which the Standing Orders Committee are embodied to rule out resolutions on subjects which have been the subject of

Conference decisions during the previous three years. And this particular power is altogether too rough and ready, and fraught with danger, for it to be the only way of reducing the conference agenda.

We are here concerned solely with matters for discussion which affect organisation. We have referred in another part of this issue to resolutions which seek to give a place in the constitution to Federations of County Constituencies, and we anticipate that on this question assurances will be given of the Party's interest in the work of County Federations and their desire to incorporate them so soon as some accord can be arrived at regarding their composition and functions.

Conditions of Membership.

South Croydon Central Labour Party seek an amendment of the rule compelling an individual member to be also a member of a Trades Union. The effect of their amendment would be to substitute the word "should" for the word "must." The amendment however, would cause the whole clause to read ungrammatically. There is also a resolution on this same clause from N.U.D.A.W. the purport of which is to instruct the National E.C. to take steps to carry the clause as it stands into effect. This is the first time a Trades Union has come down in favour of the clause as it stands.

Our own views on the whole subject were expressed in our June issue. We object to Party efforts for individual membership being diverted into a recruiting campaign for Trades Unions. Recruitment for the Trades Unions is the business of the Unions themselves. At the same time we see little hope of the South Croydon amendment being carried.

The North Leeds L.P. seek to abolish the condition that individual members must reside or be registered in the constituency to which they are attached. We expect this amendment to be opposed by the National E.C.; as also an amendment by South Leeds D.L.P. which would confine any individual to membership of one Party only.

An amendment by the United Textile Factory Workers to give representation on the basis of one delegate to the Annual Conference for every 2,500

members instead of 5,000 is directed to secure additional representation at the conference for Trades Unions only. The amendment does not propose to extend the same privilege to Local Parties, and should therefore be strenuously opposed. The same resolution was, however, moved last year, but in view of an undertaking by the Executive to examine the position it is possible that the matter will be covered in the Executive Report, or that some dispute may arise if the resolution is ruled out under Standing Order 2 (4).

Compulsory By-Election Contributions.

West Lewisham L.P. put forward the curious proposal that where any organisation is entitled to one delegate, and has nominated a member for the National E.C. it shall be entitled to appoint one additional delegate to the Conference, and North St. Pancras desire to insert the words "who is subsequently elected" after Executive Committee—an entirely impracticable proposal. We are afraid that no case can be made out for this amendment. The Conference is likely to treat the proposal summarily.

Bristol East desire to increase the numbers of the National Executive from twenty-three members plus a Treasurer to twenty-four members, plus Treasurer, by giving an additional representative to Constituencies Parties. At present there are twelve Trades Union E.C. Members to five Constituency representatives, and the value of the latter representation has always been detracted from by the fact that representatives elected are often persons equally eligible and probably more fitted for the Trades Union list. Under the circumstances, we do not think the amendment is worth fighting for at the present time. The growth of individual membership may in a few years justify a very radical alteration.

The Portsmouth Labour Party seek to make the by-election fund compulsory on all constituency Labour Parties. And why not the Trades Unions? We venture to suggest that the National E.C. report may have something to say on this matter, and that this amendment will as a consequence not be moved.

The Salford Borough Labour Party and South Salford Labour Party put forward an amendment to the present rule requiring fourpence per member affiliation fee from constituency Labour Parties, and suggest the substitution of

a percentage fee based on the gross income from members' contributions as ascertained at the end of the year. The effect of this amendment would be to penalise the up-to-date penny per week Parties and encourage those Parties with the smallest membership fee. This won't do at all.

Portsmouth desire to let Central Labour Parties in divided boroughs off with an affiliation fee of one pound per annum instead of four pounds, and Hackney suggest two pounds per annum. With present tendencies and present Party needs neither amendment is likely to go far.

An amendment regarding the date of the Annual Conference, which has our heartiest sympathy, is put forward by the Cardiff Trades and Labour Council. The present rule fixes the Conference between the last Monday in September and the second Monday in October. Cardiff wants the month of June—and so do we.

The Stourbridge D.L.P. put forward a proposal to abolish the right of the National E.C. to delete from the Conference agenda the resolutions which raise questions of policy or principle decided by Conference within the previous three years, and East Fulham wish to limit the Executive powers to two years. The comments we have made above indicate that there is not much likelihood of this resolution being carried, and there is little doubt that the agenda itself will be the most weighty argument against the repeal. At the same time, we could wish for some method less open to abuse for deleting superfluous matter from the agenda.

Some Hardy Annuals.

The Hemsworth D.L.P. have an amendment the effect of which would be to permit a person to be elected to the National E.C. whether present at the Annual Conference as a delegate or not. Certainly some hardship has been caused in the past by the present rule. But the principle at present proceeded upon is a sound one for general use. Co-optation of outside persons for election to Executive bodies is not a popular doctrine in the Labour Movement. We should expect that this amendment, and some of the others we have mentioned, will be disposed of under the Standing Orders. A similar resolution was lost last year.

A batch of resolutions once again seeking to impose a probationary period

of membership for candidates clearly fall under the operation of Standing Order 2 (4). The subject was discussed only last year.

East Ham South L.P. want Parliamentary candidates to be as far as possible under sixty years of age. But what earthly effect would it have to embody such a proposal in the rules? And with a falling birth rate too!

On the subject of Party finance two Sheffield Parties put forward a proposal for the complete reorganisation of the Party, the apparent effect of which would be to wipe out Trades Union representation from Annual Conferences, to abolish the national affiliation of Trades Unions, to divert all income to constituency Parties, and to support Head Office solely from the fees of the latter bodies. Well, we are not starting a new Party or planning a new Utopia, and we opine that this resolution will go the way of all flesh.

Affiliation Fees on Income Basis.

The Westbury D.L.P. have a resolution which incidentally draws attention to the fact that the main source of income of D.L.P.'s in rural constituencies is derived from individual membership resulting in substantial affiliation fees to Head Office, while in many industrial constituencies fed by grants from the Trades Unions the Head Office income is negligible because of a comparatively small individual membership. The resolution desires to instruct the Executive to prepare a scheme whereby affiliation shall be governed on the basis of local annual income.

The problem raised here is a serious one, and for ourselves we have some sympathy with the idea behind the proposal. We expect the movers of this resolution to be assured that the National E.C. is not unaware of the conditions of things pointed to, and that remedial measures and representations will continue to be made in the quarters where a change in conditions is to be looked for. We do not think a change in the affiliation basis is yet ripe.

The London Labour Party present a resolution asking the National E.C. to consider a report on the whole question of financing Labour candidates. Well, consideration is certainly necessary, but there is nothing new to report unless what is meant is that there shall be some recommendation to improve on present methods. Improvement would be mighty welcome.

The question of a national pool for Parliamentary candidates comes up again from Newcastle-on-Tyne, and Westbury also have a resolution on this subject. The matter is of course closely connected with the London Labour Party's resolution, and we should imagine that the National E.C. will undertake to report on all these questions.

More Organisers Wanted.

The Nottingham Central Labour Party desire a rule that all delegates of affiliated societies to Labour Party meetings must be individual members of the Party to which they are delegates. We simply cannot agree, nor will the Conference, to a proposal which would have the effect of making Trades Unionists compulsorily pay twice over, and which would also have the effect of destroying Trades Union delegateship altogether. It is admitted that Trades Union members do not pay sufficient for political purposes, but the right remedy is an increase in T.U. political levies, and an increase in affiliation fees.

Altrincham want the National E.C. to take steps to have part-time organisers appointed in large numbers, and Thornbury want to substitute full-time organisers. We shall be interested to know from the delegates of these organisations where the funds are to come from. The proposal of the Newbury D.L.P. is that the National E.C. shall consider ways and means for appointing a paid organiser to several constituencies. In our opinion no better way could be found for squandering money on an altogether insufficient and unremunerative effort. One constituency per organiser is a handful, but the supermen who can manage several have never yet been found by any Party.

Thornbury also puts forward a resolution urging an increase in the national grant in aid of agents. Their resolution was discussed last year, and will doubtless be ruled out under Standing Orders.

Of the remaining resolutions of especial interest to our readers we need only mention proposals put forward by several Divisions regarding the holding of area conferences for the purpose of considering various subjects such as the constitution, programme and policy of the Party and similar objects. The Party seem to be doing its best in this way at present.

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QUESTIONS ANSWERED HERE

Does Pension Disqualify for Council?

Question. Is a person, formerly employed as a Sanitary Inspector by a U.D.C., and now retired on a pension, thereby disqualified as a candidate for the same council?

Answer. In our opinion the person named would be qualified to sit upon the Council. There is no legal decision actually bearing upon this point, and until there is, the matter must necessarily remain in some doubt. There seems, however, to be a consensus of opinion on the question, and we are indebted to a collection of legal opinions made by the Head Office of the Party for the following three statements bearing on similar cases.

1. *Municipal Journal* in 1929 stated in answer to a similar question. "Counsel to the Association of Municipal Corporations advised in 1924 and in 1928 that the receipt of a superannuation allowance by a retired officer did not disqualify him from being a Councillor on the Council paying him the superannuation."

2. *Justice of the Peace* on May 3rd, 1930, replied to the question whether a superannuated officer of a County Council is disqualified as follows:—"In our opinion no, the superannuated officer will not be disqualified. By section 12 (1) (a) of the Municipal Corporation Act, 1882, which is incorporated with the Local Government Act, 1888, by section 75, it is enacted that a person shall be disqualified if and while he holds any office . . . or (c) has . . . any share or interest in any contract or employment by or on behalf of the Council. In our view the official having retired, will be holding no office of the Council, nor will he be interested in any contract or employment by the Council. His rights as to super-

annuation allowance are fixed by statute (we assume the Local Government and Other Officers' Superannuation Act, 1922, has been adopted), and do not depend on agreement."

3. *Local Government News*, in June 1928, said:

"It was actually decided by the House of Lords that these statutory provisions regarding superannuation for Poor Law Officers could not be contracted out of—in other words—that the arrangement made was not a contractual arrangement at all as between the officer and the Guardians."

The latter condition raises the gist of the question. If there is no contract there is no disqualification.

Free Insurance for a Local Journal.

Question. We are thinking of giving a free insurance with the (the local monthly Labour journal). Our paper would go if it had some insurance benefit added to it, but we are thinking of making it a real benefit and giving a Life Assurance to each reader in a small sum. We have thought about five pounds, and should like to know what you think of the matter?

Answer. In the first place we do not think that insurance of this amount would be a practical business proposition. Roughly speaking five pounds insurance (averaging the ages) is worth a penny per week. It cannot therefore be done for a penny per month, even if the whole income from sales was put aside for the purpose.

If our friends persist in the idea of insurance they will have to consider some benefit requiring a much smaller premium, and they will therefore be forced back on the kind of accident insurance given by daily newspapers.

Fund Raising?

We can show you how the large orders that we have received from Local Labour Secretaries enable us to serve them at trade prices.

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As to whether this is a wise policy or not is for them to decide.

In any case we strongly advise our friends not to do this thing on their own responsibility. In the first place a Government deposit of £20,000 is necessary before commencing a business of Life Assurance.

In the second place when a periodical issues free insurance coupons they bring themselves under the Stamp Act of 1870. Certain Companies who transact this sort of business on behalf of newspapers have procured private Bills of Parliament which secure them special treatment, but to-day the Commissioners of Inland Revenue have power to enter into an agreement with those who transact this sort of insurance business for the purpose of compounding the stamp duties. It would seem to be safer to approach one of the Companies who transact coupon insurance in order to be on the safe side in these matters. A quotation would no doubt be readily given.

On the other hand there would seem to be nothing to prevent our friends from making a compassionate payment to the relatives of readers who died, provided there was no contract to do so, and no attempt to establish the purchase of the paper as the basis of any agreement or the payment of a premium.

Delivering Circulars by hand an Offence.

Question. I am told that it is illegal to distribute our notices of meetings by hand to our delegates. Is this right, or

is this wrong, and what about it (if this is wrong) when we deliver our election address at the General Election?

Answer. Our correspondent is quite correct. The delivery of addressed circulars is illegal, though we believe that action has rarely been taken in this matter.

To distribute addressed circulars to electors at election times, or at other times is an offence against the Post Office Act, and a heavy punishment is attached. To accept payment for same as a paid deliverer would be a further offence, and we should not be surprised at a prosecution taking place over this matter on some occasion. The delivery of unaddressed circulars is permissible.

LABOUR AGENTS' ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Annual Conference of the National Union of Labour Organisers and Election Agents is to take place in the Co-operative Hall, Leicester, on Sunday, October 2nd, commencing at 10.30 a.m.

The agents, with the Party, have come through probably the most difficult year in the history of the Party, but notwithstanding the financial stringency, desertions and other difficulties, the Executive Report of the Union is an encouraging document. There has been but a slight fall in membership due to the closing down of agencies, and there is every indication now that despite some continued difficulties agents have a rosier prospect in front of them.

The Conference will be presided over by Mr. G. Morris, Chairman of the Union, who in the absence of any other nomination will also be the Chairman for the ensuing year.

(Concluded from page 130.)

one or two Divisions organise week-end schools and so do the Women's Committees; the sum total of all this overlapping is endless confusion, and a high cost in delegates' expenses from the persecuted Local Parties. The only remedy we know of to this state of affairs is for Local Parties to definitely make up their minds to disregard all Conferences unless they are called by the Headquarters of the Party or their own County Federation.

"Own your Hall and Pay your Way"

By Councillor A. J. THATCHER, Labour Agent, Stockton-on-Tees.

In this industrial (Borough) Constituency at the moment when nearly 50 per cent. of the insured workers are unemployed we have a continual struggle to meet our liabilities without outside aid. The Editor of "The Labour Organiser" invites me to contribute a brief article on the matter in the hope that it may be helpful to other districts. At the same time I should be only too happy to receive helpful advice.

Our expenditure weekly is approximately £13. This sum includes agent's salary, ordinary running expenses for meetings, postages and printing and stationery, etc., and costs incurred in connection with purchase of headquarters.

Our main source of income is from members' contributions.

We receive one half of the net total income from subscriptions from the Thornaby Local Labour Party, as per rules, and we pay them a proportion of affiliation fees as per rule. In the town of Stockton for the six months ending 30th June we got £102 individual members' subscriptions. We allow 20 per cent. for collecting the same, except on such receipts as are paid through the Secretary. We have a large contribution from the work of our Social Committee who presented us with over £240 last year after meeting their own incidental expenses.

We are in possession of a hall with smaller rooms and we let the former privately. We received that way in income last year a further £132.

We also sell tobacco and confectionery at our socials and get a further amount for rent and management from them. We also run a monthly paper; that is debited with rent and management expenses and a small contribution is received from that source.

Nearly one half of our income is received from the use of our hall for private lets and by Party socials. We very rarely have to pay for meeting rooms, and as the Party offices are in the hall, we thus save a large amount that would otherwise go in rents to outside people.

My view is that it would pay every Borough Party to secure its own headquarters and use the same as a means of raising funds.

I may mention that we have an excellent Social Committee. Their

accounts are audited each night after a function, and the surplus handed to me as I am not expected to take part in the work of the committee except as a member of the same for advisory purposes. An E.C. member reports on their work.

Altogether we have been fairly successful; we now handle in a month more money than we did for a whole year, during my first year at Stockton, and this is mainly due to excellent work done by our members.

As some agents might like to know how we set about buying our headquarters I append a special article on that matter.

Purchase of Headquarters.

Prior to 1928 our Party had to pay rent for offices. Meetings were held in private places and the rent so paid was a distinct loss to the Party. We also had the experience of being moved about too often. For our last rented building we paid £1 per week plus rates and all incidental costs.

We had notice to quit again in 1928 and although we were slightly in debt decided to try and purchase our own headquarters.

In the market was a Parish Hall, containing a main hall that will seat 500, with three smaller rooms; one is now used as a Party office, one is a cafe, and the other as a cloak room. The latter will seat 100 comfortably. There are two exits and it is a one-storey building, heated by steam from a boiler in the cellar.

The price of the building was £2,000; a further £100 went in legal charges and interest up to completion of purchase.

We secured an option on the purchase by the payment of £200 which had to be paid within a month. Our members were circularised, called together, and visited, and a 5/- share scheme established. We then made inquiries and found we could get a mortgage of £1,200 on the building repayable over a period of 13 years and 3 months at 50/- per week. We had to complete the purchase in six months which meant that we had to somehow get £900. We secured this by our loan scheme plus a private loan from our solicitor, on the last day.

Since November, 1928, we have redeemed the private and members'

loan account so that at the end of 1931 this stood at £329 10s. 3d. We owe the Building Society less than £1,000.

We have also spent a large sum by the installation of electricity, the making of a new cloak room, the purchase of chairs and 50 whist tables, piano, etc. The interior decorations are delightfully hand painted. The back of the platform depicts desert scenes all hand painted. All of this has been paid for out of hall income.

Our weekly costs are as follow:—

Mortgage 50/-, caretaker (part time) £1, rates, lighting, heating and sundries average £2, so that for £5 10s. per week we are buying our own home. (Prior to this we had to pay 42/- for the hire of the same hall for one night). We are relieved of having to pay rent for offices, and for ward and other Party meetings including public meetings, excepting when we have a very special speaker.

One body pays us 30/- per week rent for using the hall during the daytime, a Badminton club will pay an average of 32/- per week for 6 months of the year. We have the hall for our own use Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays for socials, etc., at night, and Sundays are used by us for Party meetings. In addition we have two spare Tuesdays per month when we can use our hall. So that by the effective use of the hall we know we can clear the balance of £2 per week, and at the same time have money for redemption of private shares held by members and for other Party purposes. It has been an excellent venture for us.

I may state the hall account is separately kept and after writing down value of the hall each year by 5 per cent. our assets exceeded liabilities last year by £484 3s. 9d. We had to execute certain deeds, appoint trustees, and a further deed was made so that the trustees act under the authority of the Party, unless we default in our payments on mortgage, when they step in. The procedure for acquiring the premises and making certain the Party obtained control was as follows:—

(1) The General Committee of the Party appointed Trustees to purchase the hall in the name of the Stockton and Thornaby Labour Party, and the terms of the resolution were submitted in writing to our solicitor. The same persons act as trustees for the mortgage.

(Note: The Party, as such, could not legally buy property without appointing trustees).

(2) The deposit was duly paid, final payment also made after the £1,200 was received from the Building Society, all this being done through the trustees.

(3) A deed was made to convey the property to the trustees of the Party.

(4) A deed was made signed by the trustees on the one hand and the President for the time being of the Party, on the other hand, under which the former agreed not to act in any way unless instructed by a resolution of the Stockton and Thornaby Labour Party. (Note: This prevents the trustees from doing what they collectively may agree to (quite legally) in regard to the use of the hall. At the same time if we fail to keep up mortgage payments they can, under the terms of the same, give a month's notice to the Party to pay up; if we fail, the trustees could sell the hall, so that as long as we keep up the mortgage payments, the Party is in full control).

May I say in conclusion, that I recognise it may not be possible for County Divisions in all cases to acquire their own premises. I certainly think all Boroughs and compact Local Labour Parties would be well advised to own their own home.

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LAW AND PRACTICE



THE LAW of LIBEL and SLANDER

On several occasions we have been asked to give readers our opinion on the relation to the law of libel of specific words and publications submitted to us. And although the law of libel receives scant attention in any text books on election law, or works dealing with electioneering, the subject is nevertheless of profound importance to election practitioners and all concerned in political controversy.

Politics sometimes evidence a "certain liveliness," and heated feelings are just the hot-bed in which libel flourishes. Not for nothing is the advice given by experienced electioneers to avoid personalities. We ourselves delight in hard hitting at election times, but we like to meet our friends the enemy with the knowledge that our hitting is clean, and whatever the temptation we do not encourage American methods of electioneering.

The British law of libel is far too real and easily invoked for trans-Atlantic methods to catch on here. But to err is human, and to err in ignorance is proletarian besides being human. Friends will forget that the opposite candidate is, after all, but a figure of his Party. It is not he we hate, but his principles.

And it is all too easy at election times and during the all-the-year-round contentions of politics to overstep the boundary, and to libel or slander one's opponent. It is because of these things that we feel an exposition of the law of libel and slander would be helpful to our readers. Our article is not intended to cover the whole of a very complicated subject, but it is directed to giving the law and facts upon aspects of the question most likely to affect Labour people through their own activities or those of the enemy. In

these talks on Law and Practice we endeavour to explain the law in simple language. If we fail here we hope our readers will attribute the blame to the subject and not to us.

Definition.

In the first place "the law of slander is an artificial law resting on very artificial distinctions and refinements. it is not like a law founded on settled principles where the Court applies established principles to new cases as they arise which fall within them." These are the words of one of His Majesty's Judges, and they explain the extreme uncertainty as to the result which attends most actions for libel.

The gist of either libel or slander is a defamatory statement. The best definition we have discovered to cover both offences is that given by the late Sir Hugh Fraser, as follows:—

"A defamatory statement is a statement concerning any person which exposes him to hatred, ridicule, or contempt, or which causes him to be shunned, or avoided, or which has a tendency to injure him in his office, profession, or trade. Such a statement, if in writing, printing, or other permanent form, is a libel; if in spoken words or significant gestures a slander."

The offence of either libel or slander is not complete except upon publication, a matter on which we shall have something more to say presently. A defamatory statement, even a written one, is quite harmless so long as it remains in the possession of the person who addresses it. Directly it leaves him and is published to a third party, or (under some circumstances) to the person libelled, an offence is committed. Our readers will best

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understand this situation by a reminder of the old Socialist illustration of the spade, which of itself is valueless until labour is applied to it. So with a defamatory statement and publication.

There are exceptions such as the protection given by the statement being made on a privileged occasion, and there is the interesting exception concerning man and wife who, in cohabitation, are, under a well-known common law principle, one person. The uttering of a libel therefore by a husband to his wife or vice versa is not publication. But this doctrine goes where the husband and wife are judicially separated.

Distinctions Between Libel and Slander.

It will be seen from the definition given above that libel and slander are different offences. Broadly speaking, the distinction between the two offences is discoverable from the fact that while libel is addressed to the eye, slander is addressed to the ear. This is not a watertight distinction, but it serves for all ordinary purposes. It follows that what is addressed to the eye is more permanent or less transient than that which is addressed to the ear, and the offence of libel is, therefore, the more serious one.

A libel may not necessarily take the form of words. It may consist of an effigy, written signs or pictures. Any of these publications may be defamatory.

Libel is both a civil wrong as well as a criminal offence. It is actionable in the first case and punishable in the second. Slander is a civil wrong done to the person slandered, but it is no criminal offence unless by reason of obscenity, blasphemy, or the inclusion of words which amount to a misdemeanour. In such case slander is punishable by criminal process just as much as libel is.

It follows that there is a difference in the legal consequences of libel and slander.

In the case of libel the law presumes that a person libelled has suffered damage, and he therefore has a right of civil action, and the liberty to claim damages without special proof of having sustained them.

The person libelled has two remedies against the libeller. He may sue for damages or/and he may prosecute criminally. He is, therefore, in an

exceptional position before the law; the libeller may not only be mulct in damages but punished by fine or imprisonment. Fortunately for the latter his peril in prosecution is lessened by the fact that the law does not altogether encourage criminal prosecutions for libel, and the prosecutor must show not only his personal injury but a public injury also occasioned by the use of the words or libel complained of.

On the other hand, slander not being a criminal offence, a prosecution cannot be entered on except the words are also a misdemeanour as indicated above. Nor does an action for slander lie unless the person slandered is able to prove actual damage arising from the slander.

There are some exceptions which admit an action for slander in virtually the same way as an action for libel, i.e., in certain cases the law will assume damage as it does in the case of libel. Thus if the slanderous statement charges a criminal offence against the person slandered, imputes that he has certain contagious diseases, imputes unchastity to any woman or girl, or is spoken of the person slandered in relation to his office, profession or trade, in all such cases damage is assumed.

Some Similar Offences.

Libel and slander are offences against the person. The injured party may be either an individual, several persons, or a corporation. One cannot slander a man's dog (or even his motor car) in the same sense that one slanders a man himself, and the same right of action does not arise.

But it is possible to slander a man's goods, or a man's title to property, in such way as to cause injury to the owner. The injured party has in this case a remedy at law, and he may sue for special damages. But an action of this sort does not fall under the law of libel and slander, nor is the offence of the nature which brings it within the same rules, and the other comments we have made.

We mention the matter here because of the special risk and danger of an action of this sort arising out of political controversy.

To challenge a man's title to property or lands, and to utter a statement that he is not entitled to them is no unknown thing in demagogic

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speech. Probably the Duke of Muckborough could afford to smile at this sort of thing and will suffer no injury thereby, but use the same words concerning a local Councillor or suggest that his inheritance or property does not rightfully belong to him, and he may well claim that his credit has suffered and secure damages accordingly.

Equally, one may aver broadly that a certain class of goods are inferior to another class of goods, but let spite and prejudice get the upper hand and begin to suggest that the Tory manufacturer's goods are badly made, or inferior, and there is at once a case for action.

In the case of "slander of title" or "slander of goods," malice must be proved. But arising out of political controversy there would ordinarily be little difficulty in proving this.

Libel or Slander Under the Corrupt Practices Acts.

Apart from the offences already enumerated, election law has established others.

Thus Section 1 of the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act, 1895, says, "any person who, or the directors of any body or Association corporate which, before or during any Parliamentary election, shall, for the purposes of affecting the return of any candidate at such election, make or publish any false statement of fact in relation to the personal character or conduct of such candidate shall be guilty of an illegal practice, within the meaning of the provisions of the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act, 1883, and shall be subject to all the penalties for and consequences of committing an illegal practice in the Act mentioned."

Similar provisions are applied to Municipal Elections by the Municipal Elections Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act, 1911, and these provisions apply to other Local Government Elections.

Unlike the ordinary law of libel and slander, it is a defence in a prosecution under the above Act if the accused person can show that he had reasonable grounds for believing, and did believe, the statement made by him to be true.

It will be noted that for the offence to be complete there must be a false statement of fact, not merely an expression of opinion; the statement of

fact must be untrue; the statement must be in relation to the personal character or conduct of the candidate: and must be made for the purpose of affecting the election of the candidate. It is necessary for the complainant to prove his case under every heading.

Publication.

And now we may proceed to examine the means by which the offence of libel and slander, as first outlined, are made complete.

It is often stated that a libel must be communicated to some third person before an offence is committed, the assumption being, one supposes, that one can write what one likes and make what defamatory statement one wishes, so long as it is sent under cover to the person concerned, and reasonable precautions are taken against the document being opened by third parties. This is not quite the case. Certainly no action for libel arises until a third party comes in, for it is only then that a person is exposed to civil injury. But in criminal proceedings it is sufficient that the libel has been published to the plaintiff himself, the foundation of such proceedings being the natural tendency of the words used to provoke a breach of the peace.

Incidentally, the principle that the "greater the truth the greater the libel" applies in criminal proceedings only. It is no defence to say the words are true. In a civil action the truth of the words complained of is a complete defence.

In our opening remarks we stated that sometimes matters had been submitted to us for advice regarding the expediency of publication, or whether such matters were libellous. It would surprise some of our friends to know that this very excess of caution amounted to publication. If one shows a defamatory statement to any third person, unless perhaps in confidence to one's own solicitor, for the purpose of legal advice thereon, an offence is committed. It is no protection if one's typist has typed the letter to say that she was a confidential clerk.

There is protection against an action for libel when the same is contained in a sealed letter addressed to the person libelled, but if the letter was likely to be opened in the ordinary course of post by a third person and was so opened and the sender of the

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letter was aware of this possibility there would be publication. A defamatory statement in a telegram is obviously a publication, and so in regard to a post card.

Though a man may be punished for the repetition of a libel or slander he is not responsible for the repetition by others of his own libel or slander, and the consequences thereof—which is sometimes a lucky thing for him. The principle is, of course, that every utterer is individually responsible.

Many of our readers are interested in the publication of periodical matter. In these publications the risk of libel is always serious, and the utmost care should be taken regarding every statement concerning political opponents, or indeed in criticising one's own side.

During recent years amendments of the law of libel have accorded those connected with newspapers a certain measure of protection, and an easier way out of the consequences of libel than fall to the lot of the average offender, but the large number of Labour monthly papers now published do not benefit by this protection on account of the definition of "newspapers" contained in the Newspaper Libel and Registration Act, 1881. Printed papers published at intervals exceeding twenty-six days are excluded.

Where the libel is contained in a newspaper or similar publication the sale of each copy is a publication of the libel, and the distributor as well as his principal is held responsible. There is a gleam of hope for the innocent distributor inasmuch as unless he is the author, printer, or original publisher of the libel he may plead in an action against him that he did not in fact publish the libel, and may prove that he did not know the paper contained, or was likely to contain, a libel. This protection is, of course, a very necessary one, for a person might quite innocently hand a newspaper to a friend. It has been stated "that a newspaper is not like a fire; a man may carry it about without being bound to suppose that it is likely to do injury."

Again, it is necessary to emphasise that where a printed publication contains a libel, the author, printer, publisher and distributor all, individually and separately, incur responsibility for the offence. There is no remedy for one against the other, nor in fact is it within the law to guarantee the printer

against the consequences of the libel. A printer may not sue on this guarantee, because the consideration is bad in law.

A person who has innocently published or repeated a libellous or slanderous statement, frequently desires to put forward the plea that the offence was unintentional or accidental, the result of the receipt of untrue information, or even that the words complained of were used in jest. None of these pleas is a good defence, and they may not even be pleaded. The effect of the libel or slander is just the same in either case. Here are some judicial pronouncements on this question.

"A person charged with libel cannot defend himself by showing that he intended in his own breast not to defame, or that he intended not to defame the plaintiff, if in fact he did both. He has none the less injured the plaintiff."

"A man in good faith may publish a libel believing it to be true and it may be found by the jury that he acted in good faith, believing it to be true, but that in fact the statement was false. Under those circumstances he has no defence to the action however excellent his intention."

"It does not signify what the writer meant; the question is whether the alleged libel was so published by the defendant that the world would apply it to the plaintiff."

"Jests of this kind are not to be endured, and the injury to the reputation of the party grieved is no way lessened by the merriment of him who makes so light of it."

"No one can cast about firebrands and death and then escape from being responsible by saying he was in sport."

The offending party sometimes seeks to justify himself by averring that the libel or slander attributed to him is merely a repetition of something someone else has said. This is a somewhat dangerous plea to urge, because it not infrequently happens that the repetition (at any rate, of slander) is made under circumstances which confer a cause of action, while the earlier statement was exempt in this respect. On the other hand, the source of information may sometimes

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be usefully pleaded in mitigation of damages.

Privilege.

This question is of profound importance in this subject. If every defamatory statement was to throw the utterer to the mercy of the person defamed by reason of actions and prosecutions, life would be unendurable.

There are times when it is necessary to speak the truth; when it is in the interests of one's employer, friends, relatives, or in the interests of society at large that certain facts should be known, and here it is well to remark that a man cannot recover damages in respect of a character which in fact he does not possess. Therefore the truth of a publication is something which may be pleaded in an action for damages though not in a prosecution, as already pointed out.

But even an untrue defamatory statement may be made in circumstances which protect the publisher or utterer. Thus there is absolute privilege for statements made in Parliament, or in the course of judicial naval or military or State proceedings. Reports published by order of Parliament are privileged, and so are newspaper reports of proceedings in a Court of Justice, if published contemporaneously with such proceedings. There is also the privilege which Trades Unions enjoy in this respect.

The question of privilege is a complicated one, and it would require a long article to adequately deal with it. We can only briefly enumerate some other occasions when privilege may be pleaded, and our list is deliberately incomplete because we desire to enumerate principally those occasions of 'privilege' having a special interest to our readers.

Occasionally, in the course of controversy, extracts are made of judicial proceedings; or what purports to be a reprinted report of same is given. Here one must avoid a libel in the title or sub-headings. The report must be strictly confined to what took place in Court, and published without comment, and it should be a fair and accurate report. But on all the occasions of which we are now dealing it may be proved that the defendant acted in bad faith, and proof of actual malice will rebut the privilege.

An extract from Parliamentary papers, or a Parliamentary speech,

while *prima facie* privileged, would not be privileged if, for instance, a speech given in Parliament was printed and circulated by a Member, and there was proof of malice. Otherwise, a Member might be able to libel his opponent or some other person and circulate his libel with impunity. Unfortunately, proof of malice may fail and the protection of the public is therefore altogether inadequate.

Reports in a newspaper of proceedings at public meetings are privileged, provided they are fair and accurate, that the meeting was lawfully held, and for the furtherance or discussion of any matter of public concern, and that the matter complained of was of public concern or that its publication was for the public benefit.

Where, however, the report is published maliciously or the newspaper refuses or neglects to insert a reasonable letter or statement by way of contradiction or explanation of such report, the privileges may disappear. Thus, a newspaper cannot claim privilege for a report of defamatory interruptions and derisive observations by a part of the audience, to the exclusion of the speech of those who intended to address the meeting. And where no speech was in fact delivered it has been held that the publication of the interruptions, etc., was not for the public benefit or matters of public concern. This, at any rate, was the substance of a jury's findings in a comparatively recent case, though the matter is still not without difficulty.

Privilege may be claimed if the defamatory statement is contained in a newspaper report of any meeting of a Town Council or similar authority, provided that the report is fair and accurate, that the matter is not blasphemous or indecent, and that the matter complained of is of public concern, and the publication is for the public benefit. If malice has entered into the act of publication, the privilege disappears, and the same applies if the newspaper refuses, as above mentioned, to insert a reasonable letter by way of contradiction or explanation.

It is important to note that a defamatory statement made to a public servant, or other person in authority with the object of redressing a public grievance, or preventing or punishing crime, is privileged. Were it not for this fact, it might be altogether risky to make a proper complaint concerning

the action of an official in a public office, and the detection and punishment of crime would be hindered. The statement must be honestly and not recklessly made, nor broadcast to more persons than necessary, nor must the statement be made maliciously.

The most important occasion on which privilege may be pleaded is when a defamatory statement is made in discharge of a duty. This is so an important a matter, raising as it does the relationships between an employer and his servants, that we will leave the discussion of it till next month.

(This article will be continued next month, when we shall recount what to do when threatened with an action or a prosecution for libel, and also give some illustrations by way of elucidation of the points already made.)

WHAT LOCAL PARTIES ARE DOING.

We have received a copy of a little annual booklet published by the Greenwich Labour Party and now in its fourth year of publication. This little booklet is not much more than pocket size, and it contains the fixtures of the various local football teams, besides a list of Party activities, affiliated organisations, and the names of the numerous officers of the Party in their various capacities.

Perhaps not an important publication, but certainly a very useful one. It keeps the name of the Party before the public, and is just one of those little sidelines in organisation which cost little, but go a long way. The booklet contains several advertisements, and there is actually a small profit on its publication. The Greenwich Labour Party also publish a local monthly with a distribution of ten thousand copies per month.

We must take this opportunity of congratulating this Party, and its live agent, Mr. A. Glyn Evans, on having this year secured a majority on the Borough Council.

Congratulations also to the Bootle Trades Council and Labour Party, Secretary, Councillor James Haworth, J.P. This Party started on its membership campaign in February with a membership of 450, though this was by no means a solid membership. The latest figures for membership are 1,820 and it is hoped to soon pass the two thousand mark. Our friends are wisely

proposing now to consolidate this membership, and tighten up the machinery in readiness, we presume, for another big push in the early part of the year.

We have received from the Devonport D.L.P. a copy of a little duplicated publication known as the "Quarterly Watchman."

This publication is duplicated on foolscap paper, and is one of the best examples of duplicated work we have seen. Heaviness and solidity has been avoided, and the layout is creditable to whoever is responsible. The contents are also delightfully readable. This journal not only contains the ordinary propaganda matter and a timely article by the candidate, but news of the Party's doings; and the news indicates a liveliness and variety of function which betoken a live Party.

There is nothing to be afraid of in publishing the activities of one's Party, and the circulation of this matter has a tendency to whet the appetite and draw in sympathisers

CORRESPONDENCE.

To the Editor

SIR,—

In view of the opening of the winter session in October, may I draw the attention of your readers to the work of the National Council of Labour Colleges. A large number of important Unions provide free access to our classes and free correspondence courses under their educational schemes with us, and these schemes will affect Trade Unionists numbering approximately a million.

At the same time the Trade Unionists not affected by those schemes can get advantage of free access to our classes by affiliating on a 2d. per member basis, and this applies also to Labour Parties and other working-class organisations.

We feel sure we can rely upon the support of "The Labour Organiser" and its readers in our task of providing independent working-class education.

Yours faithfully,

J. P. M. MILLAR,
General Secretary.

The National Council of Labour
Colleges,
Hampstead, London, N.W.3.

APPLICATIONS FOR AFFILIATION

A Suitable Form

We reproduce below a form used by the Birmingham Borough Labour Party for the purpose of regularising and securing adequate information when affiliating Local Trades Union Branches.

The use of a form of this character is to be recommended, and it will be noted that the information to be obtained

is of considerable value in several directions.

Our readers will recollect that in our issue for September, 1930, we reproduced another form used by the Birmingham Borough Labour Party in compiling its panel of Municipal Candidates.

IMPORTANT.

BIRMINGHAM BOROUGH LABOUR PARTY

APPLICATION FOR AFFILIATION

To Secretaries of Trade Union Organisations.

DEAR SIR,

In order that our records may be as complete and correct as possible, I should be glad if you would kindly fill in the particulars in the spaces provided below and return to me at your early convenience.

Yours sincerely,

GEO. MORRIS, *Secretary.*

This Branch desires to ^{*renew} make application for affiliation to the Birmingham Borough Labour Party.

*Delete the word which is inapplicable.

Name of Organisation.....
 Name or Number of Branch.....
 Is your Branch affiliated to Birmingham Trades Council?.....
 Name of Branch Secretary..... Date.....
 Address of Branch Secretary.....
 No. of Full Financial Members.....
 Meeting Place.....
 Meeting Night..... Time of Meeting.....
 Date.....

DELEGATE(S) :

NAME.

ADDRESS.

.....
.....
.....
.....

Fees.—The affiliation fee is 4d. per member per annum. Where organisations are eligible and desire to affiliate to the Birmingham Trades Council, as well as to the Labour Party, the inclusive fee is 6d. per member per annum.

Please Note :—

1. Affiliated Organisations are entitled to appoint delegates on the basis of one for every 100 members or part thereof.
2. No person shall act as a delegate who does not contribute to the political fund of his or her Trade Union.
3. The following are also ineligible to act as delegates :—
 - (a) Person acting as candidate in opposition to duly endorsed Labour Candidates.
 - (b) Persons who are members of Political Parties or organisations declared to be ineligible for affiliation to the Labour Party.

THE CHAIRMAN'S CASTING VOTE.

A correspondent writes: — Can you give us an authoritative ruling on the privileges of a chairman with reference to a casting vote. Is it correct to state that a chairman has the right, if he chooses, to vote as an ordinary member, and then, should the voting be equal, to give a casting vote? I have been given to understand that this is so according to the rules of debate, and that it was upheld on the late Board of Guardians, in Shoreditch.

The above query raises an interesting question, but as it was not clear from our correspondent's query whether he referred to the chairman of a Party meeting, or to the chairman of some public authority, we enquired what he had in mind, and we understand that the question relates to the chairman of a ward section.

It may be convenient, however, to give the general position on this question both as it relates to chairmen of statutory bodies, and to chairmen of Party meetings.

The Municipal Corporations Act which governs the proceedings of Borough Councils, and which is also applied to County Councils, contains in the second Schedule a provision covering this point.

Rule 11 reads "in case of equality of votes the chairman of a meeting shall have a second or casting vote."

The above rule is however, limited in its operation by other provisions of the same Act. For instance the chairman of a Council, if an Alderman, has no right to vote in the first place in the election of Aldermen, and therefore, in practice, he is only able to exercise a vote at all when the occasion arises to give a casting vote.

Nor may a chairman give a vote at all where he has a pecuniary interest in the matter before the Council. Further, it has been stated that this rule only applies to meetings of the Council, and that it does not apply to Committee meetings.

In regard to the meetings of Urban and District Councils the proceedings of same are governed by rules contained in the Public Health Act, 1875, which has been applied to the proceedings of these bodies. There is the simple provision that "in case of an equal division of votes the chairman has a second or casting vote."

By Schedule 1, Part 4, of the Local Government Act, 1894, the power to exercise a second or casting vote is

extended to the chairman at any meeting of a committee.

As to the powers of a chairman at public and other meetings, where his powers are not specifically laid down by any statute, or the rules of the organisation under which auspices the meeting is held, we have it on the authority of Blackwell's "Law of Meetings" that "if on a division or poll being taken, the votes recorded including that of the chairman, are equally divided, the chairman should be given a second or casting vote. Further, if any objection to the validity of the decision of any question should be made, it must be done at once and insisted upon at once."

The above seems to tell in favour of the action of the chairman mentioned by our correspondent. But Labour Party Meetings are governed, not by statute, but by the ordinary law and custom of debate, as it may be modified by Labour custom and sentiment. It is here we are certainly on difficult ground. Labour Party Rules are silent on the question, and unless local Standing Orders give guidance on the matter the position is obscure.

Broadly speaking, we would say that democratic thought is not in harmony with giving a chairman the extraordinary power of voting twice on any subject, or of creating a situation which his own vote alone can clarify. Labour sentiment requires entire impartiality in a chairman. A chairman who does the thing complained of might have difficulty in refuting a charge of impartiality in the chair, and, after all, some people are often ready to throw this charge.

Our views are supported by Mr. Walter Citrine in the "Labour Chairman." This is what he says:—

"Ordinarily the chairman's voting powers are governed by the Rules of the Society. Usually he has no vote at all on general questions, but on any motion on which the members are equally divided for and against, he has the power to give a "casting vote." This "casting vote" is not given on ballot votes, nor is it usual where very important issues are concerned. The Chairman would, in the latter event, be well advised to think twice before he votes at all.

"It is not compulsory for the chairman to exercise his casting vote. He can refuse to do so if he desires. Thus, if a motion was put and equal numbers voted for and against, the chairman can decline to vote, and declare

the motion "not carried." This is entirely a different thing from voting against the motion. This does not debar the motion from being brought forward at a later meeting. If it was lost, this could not be done without a notice of motion. On ballot votes the chairman has the right to vote like any other member."

We should like to make it clear that we have no knowledge regarding the subject matter which led to the above query.

REVIEWS

The Intelligent Man's Guide through World Chaos. By G. D. H. Cole. Pp. 680. (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1932. 5s. net.)

THE NEW ARIADNE.

The ordinary intelligent citizen, seeking his way through the economic tangles of to-day, is not unlike those youths of the ancient world, who wandering in the labyrinth of Minos, were slain and devoured by a half-human monster—the Minotaur. Theseus, who in the ancient legend overcame the monster, was able to keep his communications intact by holding in his hand the end of a skein of wool, which the king's daughter, Ariadne, paid out from her window as the hero groped his way into the maze. In this book Mr. Cole performs a similar service for the puzzled and imperilled man and woman of the modern world.

Here we have not only the salient facts and figures relating to the present crisis, but the historical perspective, without which that crisis cannot be understood, set down with the crystalline candour which is a greater virtue than impartiality. Moreover, since Mr. Cole does not pretend to be a mere neutral compiler of facts and statistics, but frankly declares his point of view, the book forms a connected whole as no would-be "unbiased" account could do. In consequence it is not only interesting, but even exciting.

The author combines with real mastery of his subject an English style which, while pleasing, is amazingly lean and bare. There are no unnecessary words, and every word is in its proper place. Reading very rapidly — after the manner of reviewers—I have not found from cover to cover a single sentence over whose meaning one need to hesitate. The tangled story of the world's distresses unfolds in these

pages with the inevitability of authentic drama. I cannot sufficiently praise Mr. Cole's extraordinary achievement.

We are passing at present through a period of political disillusionment. A Labour Government from which we hoped a great deal proved manifestly unable to ride the whirlwind, and even loyal members of the Party ask, "Who will show us any help?" For the time being, many have ceased to have any vivid sense that man can master his economic fate as he has tamed the lightning and the fire. They are thinking of unemployment and poverty and the threat of war as savages once thought of pestilence and famine.

Under such circumstances men's paramount need is to understand. In face of the cruelty of the Means Test and the ruthless persecution of the poor, it is legitimate to hope that to understand is not necessarily to forgive; it is however, to take courage. Seen as an articulated whole, even the vast catastrophe which has overtaken our world becomes a limited and manageable thing. From this point of view, this book may well prove the most important literary event in the contemporary history of our movement.

I hope, therefore, that every Labour agent and every candidate will not only secure a copy, but commend it very urgently to Party members and audiences. To produce a book like this at the price of a novel is an act of courage. The author and his publishers evidently believe that several hundred thousand people within and without the Labour movement will be prepared to risk five shillings on the hope of understanding what has happened to the modern world. Since I share their belief that the public mind is more serious than editors and publishers usually assert, I do not think they will be disappointed.

Anyhow, Ariadne's Skein is cheap enough at the price.

LOUIS ANDERSON FENN.

VILLAGE MEETINGS.

It is perfectly certain that in some way or other each village in a county constituency should have its annual political gathering, as, no matter how small the village may be, there is generally an idea that it has been neglected if a neighbouring hamlet should secure a visit from the member or candidate; while it has to be content with a joint meeting or no meeting at all.

Of course, in many cases, the aspirant for Parliamentary honours must himself find it impossible to attend; but arrangements should be made for the presence of one local speaker and one reliable speaker from London or the county town, and an invitation should be sent to each elector by post or delivery, with a request that he will attend the meeting held in the village.

Resolutions of confidence are generally unnecessary at village meetings, even at election times. In some places (and herein local judgment must be exercised) they are objectionable, giving, as they do, an opportunity for the moving of an amendment by some noisy and wordy resident, who will rejoice in the opportunity of airing his eloquence at a public meeting. Votes of thanks to the chairman and the speakers, and to the person lending the room are, generally speaking, all that will be necessary to give an opportunity for speeches from local supporters.

Members of Parliament are really not so much a necessity at village meetings as the presence of some experienced politician, who will take the trouble to discuss political and social questions, and especially questions in which the labouring classes are at the time interested, in the simple language of the country. Unfortunately, in village meetings Party speakers too often assume a knowledge of imperial and foreign policy which is not always or perhaps generally possessed by the local mind. Failure ensues. Why? Because there is a want of sympathy. A practised political speaker can, without pandering to the ignorance or the lower nature of his hearers, adapt his manner and language to the understanding and to the edification of the people to whom he is talking. Local details he can gather on the spot. The most cultivated gentleman need never be ashamed of speaking that plain, simple, and nervous English which all can understand, and which William Cobbett used with so much effect, whether his subjects were political or otherwise, when he addressed himself to those whom he pleasantly called "the Chopsticks."

An attempt should always be made to obtain the interest of the young men in shops and offices in village work, as they have long winter evenings unoccupied, and often form a very good band of volunteers for concerts and meetings.

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